

FIRST
COMICS
LIMITED
SERIES
NO.2 of 3

THE P.I.'S

MAR. \$1.25
NO. 2
\$1.60 CANADA

MICHAEL MAUSER™ and MS. TREE™



plus!
MIKE GRELL'S
TRIBUTE TO
MICKEY SPILLANE!

PRIVATE LETTERS

C/O FIRST COMICS
1014 DAVIS ST.
EVANSTON, IL 60201



As some of the readers of the *P.I.'s* surely know, I've been the writer of the syndicated *Dick Tracy* comic strip since 1977, when creator **Chester Gould** retired. So some may consider me biased when I insist that the comic-strip private eye began with *Dick Tracy*.

But Tracy's brand of lone-wolf investigating (despite Chet Gould's penchant for shooting police procedure techniques into the strip from the very beginning) had much to do with forging the image of the private eye in comics (and popular culture, in general). Like Mike Hammer, Tracy's first case is one of vengeance: he is seeking the killer of his girl friend's father.

In one early story, Tracy tells villain Stogie Villier, "Next time I run into you, I'm going to shoot first, and investigate later." Tracy's hardboiled, two-fisted approach paved the way for tough fictional dicks — private and public — for generations to come. And his trenchcoated, snapbrim hatted appearance set the look for the eye for once and for all.

The private eye himself has been something of a rarity in comics. There have been plenty of tough comic-strip detectives following in Tracy's wake — In the early days, notably, **Dashiell Hammett** and **Alex Raymond's Secret Agent X-9**, **Will Gould's Red Barry** and **Norman Marsh's Dan Dunn** — but the Sam Spade-style private eye was something of an exception, not a rule.

Alfred Andriole moved from *Charlie Chan* (given a tough, private-eye type sidekick, for his comics incarnation) to *Dan Dunn* to *Kerry Drake*. Among various professional and amateur detectives was perhaps *Ms. Tree's* most conspicuous forerunner, *Invisible Scarlet O'Neil*, from the pen of a Gould assistant, **Russell Stamm**.

After the war came a few legitimate private eyes to the funny pages — *Vic Flint*, *Rip Kirby*, *Peter Scratch*, even *Mike Hammer* — but none of them made any particular mark, though **Alex Raymond's** creation Kirby has lived a long and moderately popular life. *Peter Scratch* — a rather shameless imitation of the popular TV series *Peter Gunn* — was drawn by Golden Age great **Lou Fine**, who had done a series of single-page Sam Spade strips for newspaper and comic book publication in the 1950s; these slickly drawn one-pagers were hair tonic ads, tying into the sponsor of the long-running Spade radio show starring **Howard Duff**.

When Spade creator **Dashiell**

Hammett became a victim of McCarthy era witchhunting, the radio show was re-named *The Adventures Of Charlie Wilde*, and so were the comic strip ads by Lou Fine. It should also be noted that a comic book version of *The Maltese Falcon* (Hammett's only Sam Spade novel) appeared as a Feature Book from McKay in 1946.

No private eye has ever really made a major mark in the comic book field (at least before *Ms. Tree* and *Mike Hammer*), although the pages of *Detective Comics* had its share of tough sleuths, as back-up features to *Batman* (something of a tough detective himself, by the way).

The outstanding comic-book private eye of the '50s was **Pete Moris's Johnny Dynamite**, from Comic Media and, later, Charlton. Johnny Dynamite was a Mike Hammer pastiche, and rivals the version Spillane and Ed Robbins did in the "Official" Mike Hammer comic strip. Dynamite wears a pre-Nick Fury eyepatch and blasts bad guys with his .45, and has a surprisingly good time with beves of beauties, at least in the pre-Comics Code issues. Moris used a voice-over narration in *Dynamite*, and used it well, though that device often doesn't work in comic books.

Somewhat similar to *Dynamite* was **Dick Giordano's** entertaining *Sarge Steel*, one of the longest running private eye comic books. Steel was the first comic-book PI to be a Vietnam vet; in fact, he lost a hand there, replacing it with a steel mitt and giving the book a faint superhero echo.

This tough, well-written, well-drawn mid-'60s PI book — often scripted by Spillane crony **Joe Gill** — paved the way for Charlton's later series of Mike Mauser stories, in the back of *Vengeance Squad*.

There have been other comic book private eyes — a few years ago **Jim Steranko's** exquisitely drawn graphic novel, *Chandler*, appeared; and DC periodically does private eyes, most recently **Johnny Double** and **Nathaniel Dusk**, the latter a period-piece P.I. book trumpeting itself as the first private-eye comic in years, conveniently forgetting about *Ms. Tree* (a regular feature since '81).

Speaking of which, *Ms. Tree's* history has been discussed in some detail elsewhere (specifically, the introduction to the trade paperback collection, *The Files Of Ms. Tree*, published by Aardvark-Vanaheim and available in your local comics shop even as you read this). But suffice to say that **Terry Beatty** and I were tired of the trend toward superheroes,

fantasy and science fiction in comics, and wanted to try something that would be old and new all at once. And *Ms. Tree* was hailed in some quarters as being "brave" and "innovative." Actually, we see *Ms. Tree* as a good, straight, tough private-eye tale, firmly set in the traditions of the form.

On the other hand, one of the fun things about working in a genre is to set its conventions and clichés on their ears, which we attempt to do frequently in *Ms. Tree*, starting with the premise for the feature itself. One of the standard clichés of PI fiction is for the tough, male private eye and his beautiful female secretary to be in love — but, somehow, nothing much ever seems to come of it, especially marriage.

This is a tradition maintained from Sam Spade and Effie Perrine through Mike Hammer and Velda, and beyond. We turned that cliché inside out, by having the tough PI marry his beautiful secretary — only on their wedding night, the tough PI is murdered and his secretary/bride must pick up the pieces. Specifically, she takes over his agency, becomes a PI herself, and takes on his murder as her first case.

The private eye is currently undergoing a renaissance in the book trade; perhaps we're on the verge of one in comics, too. With the success of *Ms. Tree*, the popularity of Mauser in *E-Man*, the revival of interest in *Will Eisner's Spirit*, and such near-PI heroes as *Jon Sable* (a blockbuster success, no less), the eyes may just be beginning to open.

— Max Collins

AND NEXT ISSUE "You Will Believe A Man Can Die," the dramatic wind-up to *The P.I.'s* mini-series by **Collins, Staton** and **Beatty**. We'll see you here in two months.

Rick Obadiash, Publisher

Mike Gold, Managing Editor
Rick Oliver, Editorial Coordinator
Alex Waid

Production Manager

Ralph C. Muscant,
Operations Director
Kathy Kulsiras,
Direct Sales Manager

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**A FIRST COMICS
PUBLISHING PRODUCTION**

THE P.I.'s FOUR COLOR CRIME

part two: ALL IN COLOR FOR A CRIME

The name's Mauser-P.I., which tonight stands for *pretty irritated*. First, my lady client tells me she thinks her husband's strayin'—then, when I follow hubby, I find the *both* of 'em standin' over the corpse of Kosmo Kosmic, comic-book shop proprietor!

And if *that* ain't bad enough, the husband nixed a P.I. himself—that snooty *Ms. Michael Tree*, who has in common with me, the same first name, but nothin' else.

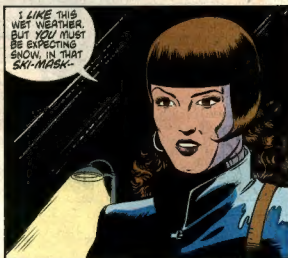
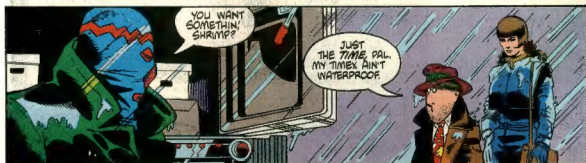
MAX COLLINS
writer
JOE STATON
penciller
TERRY BEATTY
inker
KEN BRUZENAK
letterer
WENDY FIORE
colorist
MIKE GOLD
editor

My name is Michael Tree, and I'm a *private investigator*. What began as a standard "cheating wife" job has turned into a *murder case*—against a backdrop of comic-book collaging, of all things.

And, as I'm beginning to learn, comic books are not necessarily a *laughing matter*—

michael
MAUSER
private
eye
created by
**NICOLA CUTI &
JOE STATON**

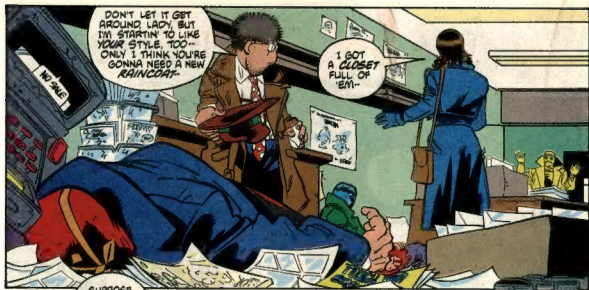
Ms. TREE
created by
**MAX COLLINS &
TERRY BEATTY**





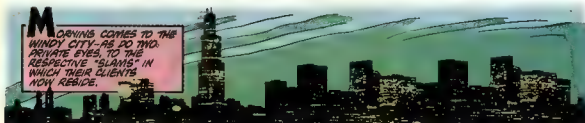




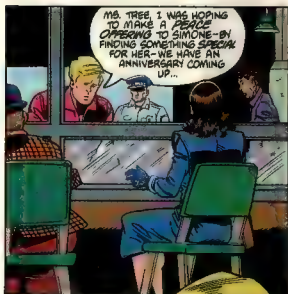




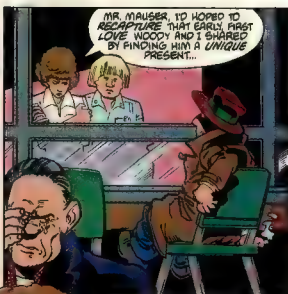




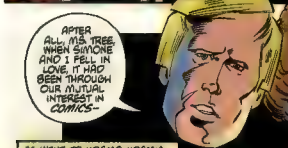
MORNING COMES TO THE WINDY CITY-AS DO TWO PRIVATE EYES, TO THE RESPECTIVE "SLAMS" IN WHICH THEIR CLIENTS NOW RESIDE.



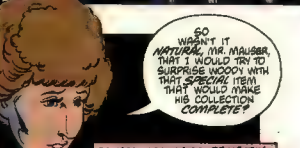
MS. TREE, I WAS HOPING TO MAKE A PEACE OFFERING TO SIMONE-BY FINDING SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR HER-WE HAVE AN ANNIVERSARY COMING UP...



MR. MAUSER, I'D HOPED TO RECAPTURE THAT EARLY FIRST LOVE WOODY AND I SHARED BY FINDING HIM A UNIQUE PRESENT...



AFTER ALL, MS. TREE, WHEN SIMONE AND I FELL IN LOVE, IT HAD BEEN THROUGH OUR MUTUAL INTEREST IN COMICS--



SO WASN'T IT NATURAL, MR. MAUSER, THAT I WOULD TRY TO SURPRISE WOODY WITH THAT SPECIAL ITEM THAT WOULD MAKE HIS COLLECTION COMPLETE?



"I WENT TO KOSMO KOSMIC-DESPITE OUR RECENT FALLING OUT, I KNEW HE HAD THE CONNECTIONS TO FIND THAT SPECIAL PRESENT FOR SIMONE--THE ORIGINAL ART FOR THE COVER OF A YOUNG ROMANCE COMIC--"



"I MET WITH KOSMO PRIVATELY-DESPITE NOT WIKING HIM, I KNEW THAT IF ANYBODY COULD FIND WHAT I WAS AFTER, IT WAS HIM--NAMELY, AN ORIGINAL COVER FROM CRIME SUSPENSORIES--"





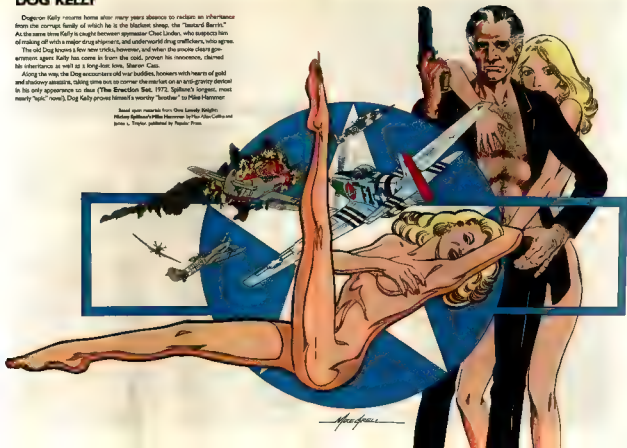
DOG KELLY

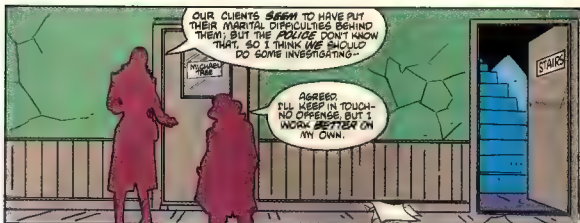
Dog/Ken Kelly returns home after many years absence to reclaim an inheritance from the corrupt family of which he is the blackest sheep, the "bastard Barrin." At the same time Kelly is caught between spy-master "Chev Linden," who suspects him of making off with a major drug shipment, and underworld drug traffickers, who agree.

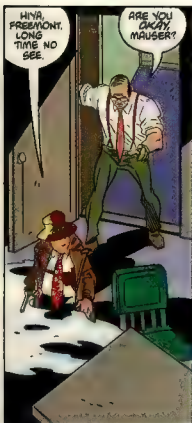
The old Dog knows a few new tricks, however, and when the smoke clears government agent Kelly has come in from the cold, proven his innocence, claimed his inheritance as well as a long-lost love, Sharon Cass.

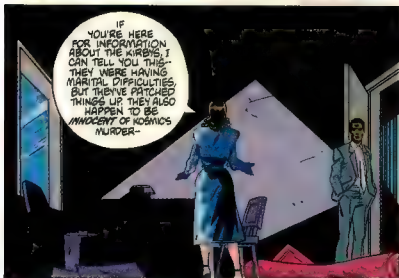
Along the way, the Dog encounters old war buddies, hookers with hearts of gold and shadowy assassins, taking time out to corner the market on an anti-gravity device in his only appearance to date (*The Erection Set*, 1972, Spillane's longest, most nearly "epic" novel). Dog Kelly proves himself a worthy "brother" to Mike Hammer.

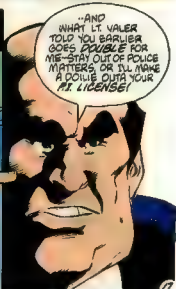
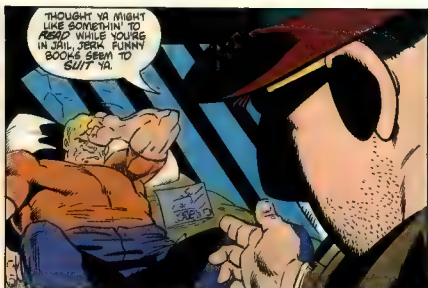
Based upon material from *One Lonely Knight*:
Michael Spillane's *Mike Hammer* by *Harold Collins* and
James L. Tipton, published by Popular Press.

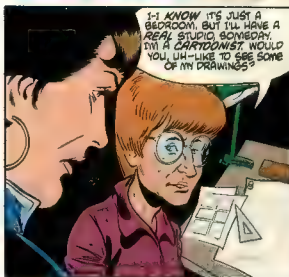
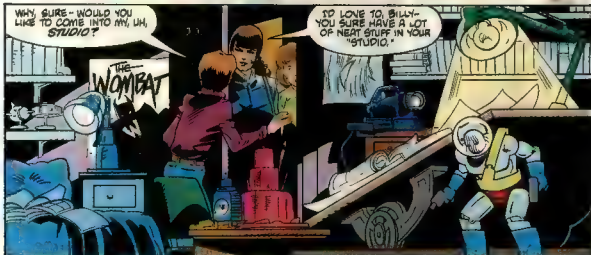








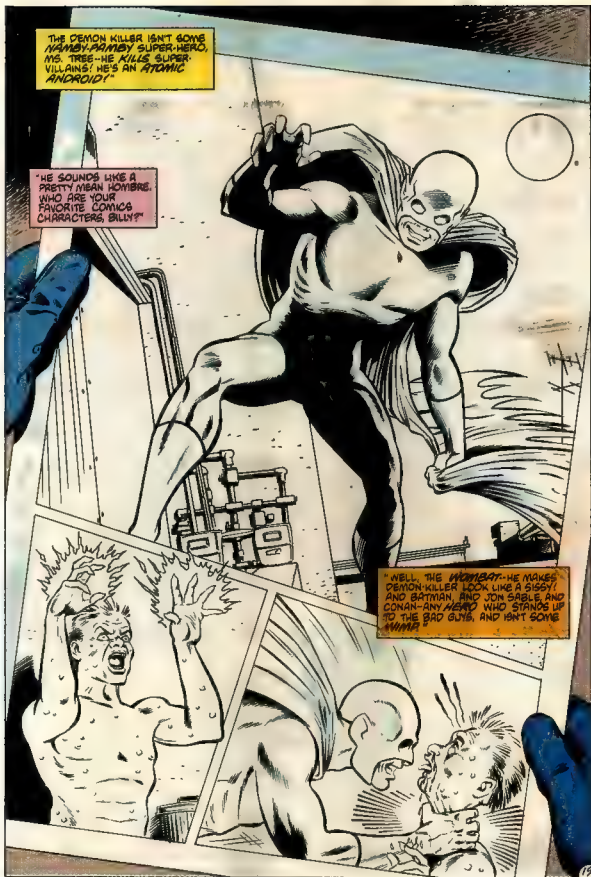


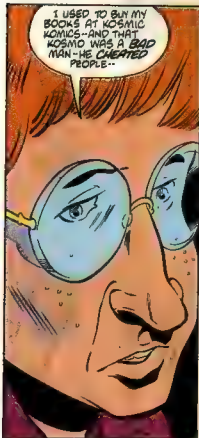


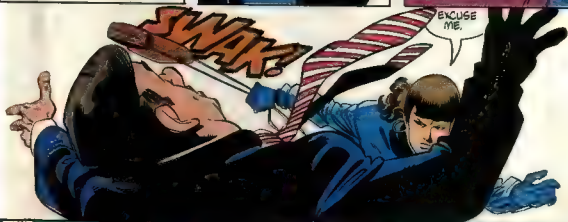
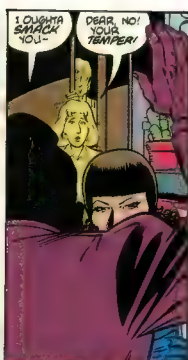
THE DEMON KILLER ISN'T SOME
NANBY-PANBY SUPER-HERO,
MRS. TREE--HE KILLS SUPER-
VILLAINS! HE'S AN ATOMIC
ANDROID!

"HE SOUNDS LIKE A
PRETTY MEAN HOMBRE.
WHO ARE YOUR
FAVORITE COMICS
CHARACTERS, BILLY?"

"WELL, THE **WOMBAT**--HE MAKES
DEMON-KILLER LOOK LIKE A SISSY!
AND BATMAN, AND JON SABLE, AND
CONAN--ANY **HEAD** WHO STANDS UP
TO THE BAD GUYS, AND ISN'T SOME
WIMPA!"









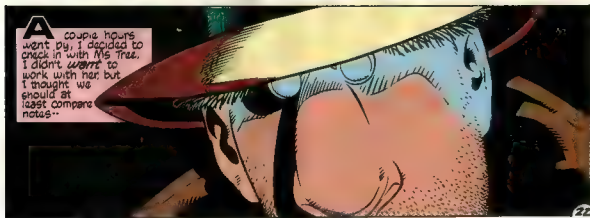
That comic book thief must've had a *real* lawyer—because he was out on bail. So I followed him.



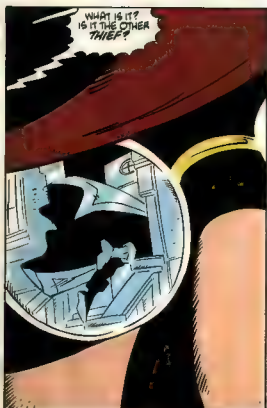
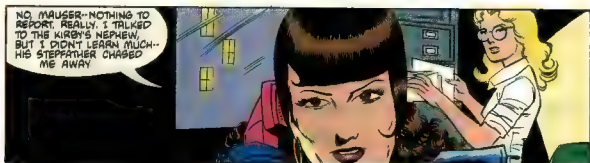
His name was Sai Lumpino—a k a, Sally the Lump. I knew where. One of his two buddies was county jail's hospital wing, where Mr. Tree's slug in the leg put him.

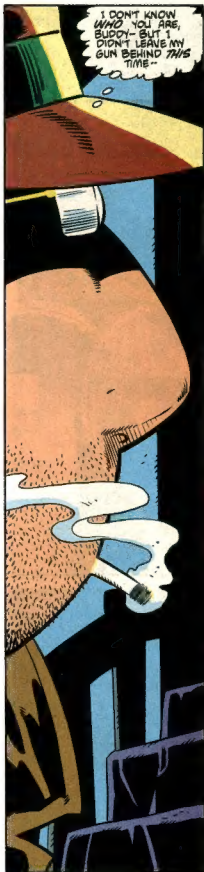


And I was gonna stick with Lumpino until he led me to the *other* one—the guy I *lost* in the alley behind Kosmic's.

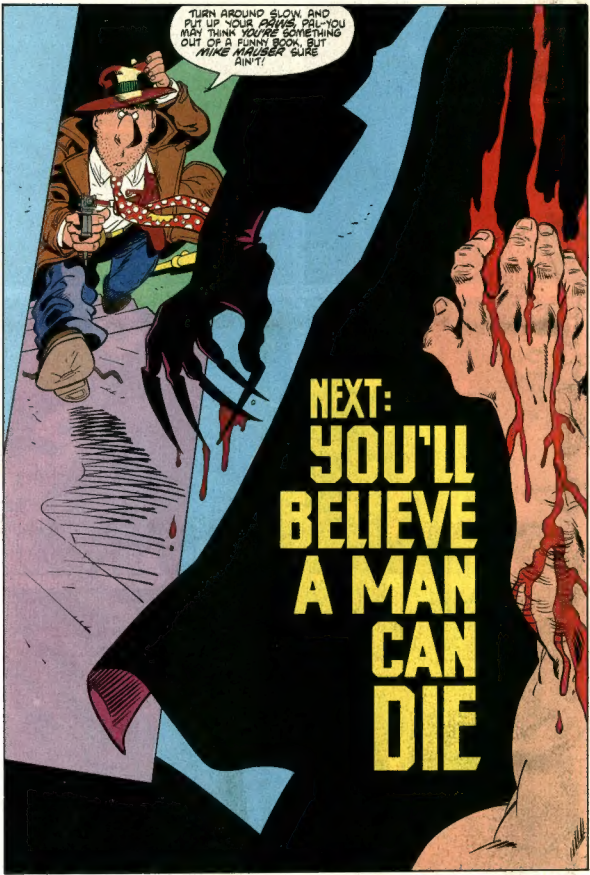


A couple hours went by, I decided to crack in with Mr. Tree. I didn't *want* to work with her, but I thought we should at least compare notes—









TURN AROUND SLOW, AND
PUT UP YOUR *PAWS*, PAL-YOU
MAY THINK YOU'RE SOMETHING
OUT OF A FUNNY BOOK, BUT
MIKE MAUSER SURE
AIN'T!

NEXT:
**YOU'LL
BELIEVE
A MAN
CAN
DIE**

ANOTHER
SCAN BY
CLEVELAND'S OWN...

GLITCH



YOU DOWN WITH DCF?